

“Be Pagan Once Again”: Folk Music, Heritage, and Socio-sacred Networks in Contemporary American Paganism

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Abstract

Religious music serves to co-create and carry strategies of theology, authenticity, and behavior. This article examines the history of folk music and folk ideology in creating and maintaining such strategies. I examine several prominent examples of American folk music and Pagan music, articulating their shared historical and theological relationships. Focusing on nationalism, feminism, and populism, I also argue that an ideology of the common ritual year is a prominent shared theme between American folk music and contemporary Paganism. While underscoring the need for greater attention to this area, the article concludes that the legitimization processes at work are similar to other American heritage musics and aspects of American cultural politics.

In recent years, there has been a veritable explosion in the study of religious music. Works by David Stowe, Stephen Marini, and Michael D. McNally have added greatly to our understanding of the role of religious music in American culture. As one researcher notes, “music serves as the carrier of creeds and core beliefs.” But, with a few notable exceptions, Pagan music has not yet received the attention commensurate to its history, diversity, and functionality within contemporary American Paganism.¹

At the same time, it will not surprise the informed reader that music, song, and poetics have enjoyed a major role in the formation and growth of contemporary Paganism. As Sabina Magliocco has aptly demonstrated in *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, music has been,

1. David Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3; Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

following Stowe, one important carrier and generator of the folklore behind much of Pagan ideology.² But the precise nature and tenor of these processes are still far from clear, especially in terms of research and analysis on the role of folk music in creating and transmitting ideologies of authenticity in contemporary Paganism. The folk-song movement in Britain and the United States has been a specific crucible for creating heritage—its polyvalent cultural politics transmuted into nationalist, feminist, and populist ideologies in contemporary Paganism. Similarly, the 'heritage' of a common Pagan ritual year was reinforced through folk music.

Certain terms need to be clarified because, as Michael Strmiska has demonstrated, the term has a larger cross-cultural history within recent Paganism.³ By using the term folk music, I am deliberately referring to a category of cultural production created and documented in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and the United States. Not all such music was necessarily created as self-consciously "Pagan." Yet at the same time this music has created a multitude of roles in cultivating and transmitting values in contemporary American Paganism.

As such, it is important to focus as much on how people use music, as well as how people create music. In this way, we can begin to analyze the many "languages" of Paganism in what some scholars have called the Proto-Revivalist period.⁴ With that in mind, I would like to begin by introducing how I came to think about this topic—an example of musical marketing in the Pagan community.

In February of 2005, I attended Pantheacon, a Pagan conference/festival in San Francisco. In particular, I sought out Anne Hill, a longtime community member and institution of Pagan musicality in her own right. As I approached her merchant's booth, one of several focused on music, I could not help but be struck by the first compact disc I saw prominently on display. It was Fairport Convention's 1969 *Liege and Lief*, a standard folkrock work that continues to draw airplay to this day. Apart from its historical role in rock music, it remains a volume owned

2. Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 194.

3. Michael Strmiska, "The Music of the Past in Modern Baltic Paganism," *Nova Religio* 8.3 (March 2005): 39-58.

4. For a discussion of the British "languages of Paganism," see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-31. I follow Hutton in emphasizing the importance of investigating discourses of Paganism, especially in the American context. "Proto-Revivalism" is a term coined in Chas S. Clifton and Graham Harvey, eds., *The Paganism Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

and played regularly by many, both part of and apart from the Pagan community.

I purchased *Liege and Lief* for my own collection that day and found it a useful mediating element of conversation between Anne and myself. The liner notes draw attention to the role attributed to Sandy Denny in the group as not only a performer, but also as an educator on British “traditional” ballads. As part of the direction the group was taking, Ashley Hutchings even began researching British ballads at the English Folk Song and Dance Society’s Cecil Sharp House for inspiration. The group was also “enamored of American roots music...immersed in the roots of that culture.” Fairport’s vision for *Liege and Lief* was to take historically British music and create a “repertoire” as quintessentially “English,” as the US group The Band was quintessentially “American.”⁵

Historian Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has recently defined the word “heritage” as something that, “while it looks old, is actually something new. Heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.” Heritage music, she goes on to say, is “music that has been singled out for preservation, protection, enshrinement, and revival.”⁶ In a very straightforward way, Fairport Convention was creating “heritage music” as a way of reinventing itself after a horribly tragic crash that took the life of a band member. Fairport’s effort not only consisted of lyrical sound, but pictorial homages in its liner notes to allegedly ancient ritual dances (such as the Morris dance) and other traditional practices such as wren-hunting. Moreover, *Liege and Lief*’s liner notes singled out two historical figures as inspirations for their music. These two figures are key: Francis James Child (1825–1896) and Cecil Sharp (1859–1924).

Setting the Stage for Pagan Folk Song: Child, Sharp, and Williams

Child, identified often as the “progenitor of the American folk song movement,” was a scholar of Shakespeare and a literary folklorist. He collected copies of British ballads from versions residing in manuscript collections and archives, expressing a preference for pre-1475 texts. He did not regard living sources as authoritative. Rather, he was adamant that versions sung by living people were “polluted” through songs and peoples’ exposure to the modern industrial world. Even those manuscript versions

5. Joe Boyd, introduction to brochure notes for Fairport Convention, *Liege and Lief*, Island Records Remastered Series, IMCD 291, reissued in 2002.

6. Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12–13.

dated after the arrival of the printing press in Britain were suspect. Child criticized earlier collectors for "doctoring" texts, although he himself took an active role as editor. In his 1860 work, *The English and Scottish Ballads*, he claimed that his selection was guided by using only the most "authentic" copies. But in his role as editor, Child is known to have excised words and verses he deemed "tasteless" or bawdy.⁷ Child was so successful that his work almost single-handedly formed the frame of reference for future scholarly and popular endeavors.⁷

After Child, interest in folk-song collection grew not only among scholars, but also popularizers (often one and the same). Collection was often driven by concerns that these songs would be lost because of increasing technology, industry, and education. All these factors were simply code words for the larger spectre of modernity itself. Cecil Sharp, whose archives engaged Fairport Convention, was perhaps the most extensive of these post-Child collectors. But rather than simple collection, Sharp's avowed agenda was to "reintegrate folk songs into people's everyday lives." Sharp endeavored to use folk music to forge a British national culture resistant to the "corrupting" forces of industrial progress. This was perfectly consonant with other elements of British Romanticism at the time, a romanticism that formed the crucible of modern Pagan Witchcraft. While not a Pagan himself, Sharp was well acquainted with Spiritualism, Christian Science, and other new religious movements of the Western nineteenth century.

Sharp advocated the idea that education, at its best, refines the latent, inherent, vitalistic qualities in individuals and communities. Folk song, in his mind, was an important part of just such a task. A "folk song" begins with an individual, but evolves as the product of community authorship, thus embodying the values and powers of that community. Therefore, the true musical (and moral) character of a nation can be measured by the musical output of those persons least affected by "modernist" influences. Using this logic, educational use of English folk song could build up and bring out the inborn values and national character in students. Perhaps the most intriguing and paradoxical of Sharp's ideas was his proclamation that he had found his ideal candidates for English folk songs and peasantry, not in England, but "preserved" in the American Appalachian mountains by peoples "unspoiled" by modernity and industrialism.⁸

7. Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 14-15.

8. A.H. Fox Strangways and Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 22-23, 91, 64, 148, 158, 171-76.

Others connected to the Romantic cultural movement in nineteenth-century Britain, like Ralph Vaughan Williams, also echoed these sentiments. Vaughan Williams, an ardent admirer of Sharp, taught that "every art... must be founded on something natural in the human being." Moreover, Vaughan Williams took pains to describe the formation and importance of folk song as compared to other cultural standards of Western civilization, such as the Bible and the *Iliad*.⁹ At the same time, Vaughan Williams was careful to present folk song as the salvation of the ordinary man, a salvation accomplished through "the music that has for generations voiced the spiritual longings of our race."

This project was most clearly articulated in Great Britain and was to have very powerful implications for American Paganism, precisely because it claimed to preserve a pre-capitalist or anti-industrialist culture of the countryside. But in fact, this *volkisch* impulse so important to both folk song and later Paganism was based in the German philosophical fascination with the *Kultur des Volkes* and led to the mythic valorization of white people by early folklorists as the "true folk." Figures such as Child and Sharp utilized German romantic ideology to assert "that mountain culture was America's authentic folk inheritance, and at the same time stressed that the mountaineers were British."¹⁰

But this folk project was not simply the creation of a past. Like all heritage discourse, Pagan or otherwise, a usable past was a means to possible futures. One future that came to pass was the creation of new high works of English musical art based in folk melodies, such as those done by Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Another future was the rise of modern Pagan witchcraft.¹¹ Those early folk themes of vitalistic rurality and populism were transformed through this latter process.

Pagan Anthems of Folk Song: Nationalism, Feminism, Populism

The romantic nationalist impulse at the heart of the modern folk-song movement, both in its American and British components, has been highly mutable and malleable in the contemporary Pagan context, as well as highly intertwined with other discourses and various forms of politics and ideology. For example, former ADF archdruid Isaac Bonewits in 1972 transformed the 1840s Irish republican song "A Nation Once Again" into "Be Pagan Once Again." This time, however, Irish nationalism was

9. Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23-29; Strangways and Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp*, 90.

10. Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 25.

11. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 118-19.

threatened not by the empires of Greece, Rome, or Britain, but by centuries of Christian hegemony.¹² In response, Bonewits advocated kicking out Christian institutionalism and a "return" to romantic pastoral Paganism. As a religious twist on Sharp's educational ideas, Bonewits saw folk song as a tool of re-educating Irish culture towards its roots of vitalistic Paganism. Not only were "Be Pagan Once Again" and other early 1970s' Pagan musics culturally resistant towards Christian outsiders, but they also grounded modern Pagans in a view thought to be that of ancient Pagans. For a religious impulse that sees itself largely as a socio-sacred network connecting sacred Persons, Places, and Power, it was paramount to define and claim the historical reaches of that network – its heritage.

But as studies of folk-song culture have emphasized, romantic nationalist impulses have not been the only theme explored. Despite Child's disdain for living singers, and Sharp's desire to uplift them, a continuing thread of folk-music history has been an active sense of political populism and identity politics – one not limited to rural Appalachians. Alix Dobkin, a lesbian activist and folk singer, collaborated with Kay Gardner and Patches Attom in the early 1970s to produce a musical staple of lesbian feminist consciousness-raising: *Lavender Jane Loves Women*. Lavender Jane was a major project of re-fashioning previous discourses. Dobkin, like Bonewits, adopted and changed music from the 1840s to suit her own needs, while preserving the instrumental form. She transformed "Beware, Young Ladies" from a tune preaching the avoidance of slovenly men to one proclaiming the unfitness of all men for partnering. Dobkin, like many in the folk scene, was fond of Pete Seeger's musical politics, and rewrote his ballad "Talking Union" as "Talking Lesbian." But religiously, the same record finds Dobkin and Gardner producing "Her Precious Love," a concise statement of theological creationism. This ballad was nothing less than a hymnal celebration of lesbian sexuality in multiple modes of Goddess cosmogony, hierophany, and collective political identity.

Glory to Her for the joys of living
And praised be Her power, Her tender care
Forever in beauty Her light shines upon me
The blessing of precious woman's love¹³

12. Isaac Bonewits, "Be Pagan Once Again," *Be Pagan Once Again* (Association for Consciousness Exploration, Compact Disc, no catalog number, 1972. Reissue 2003), lyrics available at http://www.neopagan.net/IB_Songs_Irish.html. "A Nation Once Again" was reputedly the work of Thomas Osbourne Davis, an Irish Catholic activist. It was re-recorded by many folk artists in the mid-twentieth century.

13. Alix Dobkin, "Her Precious Love," *Lavender Jane Loves Women* (Women's Wax Works, LP record, November 1973. Reissued on Compact Disc as *Living with Lavender*

In the United States, folk songs have often taken different routes as well. Rather than serving as a statement of personal identity or prominent nationalism, these songs embodied a vernacular populism. Perhaps no folk songs have arguably epitomized such impulses as clearly and broadly as “This Land is your Land” by Woody Guthrie and “If I Had a Hammer” by Lee Hays and Pete Seeger. And again, contemporary Pagans have seen fit to draw on the folk-song crucible in pursuance of contemporary religious practice and identity politics. Just as Alix Dobkin made Goddess theology a single facet of a larger political statement, the Fellowship of the Spiral Path’s *Liturgy for Lady Liberty*, performed at the 2005 Pantheon, reversed this approach. Instead, the *Liturgy for Lady Liberty* wove several prominent vernacular populist and nationalist songs into its larger religious service. While many of these liturgical songs would be easily recognizable by many Pagans (“We All Come from the Goddess”), others like “Of Thee I Sing” might be more familiar to American patriots.¹⁴ Or perhaps with its rewritten lyrics, it might not:

Blessed and bounteous land,
Safe in the Lady’s hand,
Of Thee I sing.
Terrors are turned away
Routed by freedom’s ray;
Chastened by light of day,
All fears take wing.

Having first established the importance of the Status of Liberty as a Goddess icon to be addressed, the service framed her and her devotees as having sacred dominion over the entire geographical American continent. This was accomplished with the aid of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is your Land” as well as Pete Seeger’s and Lee Hays’s “If I Had a Hammer (The Hammer Song).”¹⁵ If Bonewits and others claimed the historical lineage of ancient Paganism as a socio-sacred network, both Dobkin and the Fellowship of the Spiral Path each extended and defined that network along class and gender lines. But at the same time, we must

Jane, Ladyslipper Music, WWA001, 1997). In a 2005 conference presentation, I played this song as an example, and rows of prominent Pagan practitioners started to sing along with a song that obviously still had religious currency many years later. By the time of this album’s release, Dobkin’s musical partner, Kay Gardner, was already a practicing witch. See Marini, *A Sacred Song in America*, 172-73.

14. The song is better known as “America,” of course, but the program’s title came from its first line: “My country, ‘tis of thee, of thee I sing.”

15. Fellowship of the Spiral Path, “Liturgy for Lady Liberty Songsheet,” original document in author’s possession.

regard Dobkin as also testifying to the immediate presence and worthiness of the Goddess as Sacred Person and her associated Power communicated to her devotees – that of love, grace, and the “joy in living.”

As often happens, even anonymous individuals and popular singing groups have woven these discourses into other interesting patterns. On Apple Computer’s popular iTunes website, a “top rated iMix” goes by the name “Great Pagan/Celtic Music.”¹⁶ Among selections by Blackmore’s Night, Emerald Rose, and Marianne Faithful, Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie’s “Old Time Religion” makes an appearance. Conversely, Blackmore’s Night, a musical group with its own tangled history in different “languages of Paganism,” has made its own foray into interpretations of acoustic folk, with their own cover of Bob Dylan’s “The Times they are A-Changin’,” part of a 2001 compilation album also featuring Vangelis, Ofra Haza, Sinéad O’Connor, and Jewel.¹⁷ Pagans are clearly not just dipping from the folk-song crucible, they continually add and remix new ingredients and contexts.

From Politics to Culture: The Ritual Year as “Old Time Religion”

The well-known song “Old Time Religion” is an important segue between different ideological uses in this contested field of identity and power. How else can we characterize this use of music? What do we find in the creation of this “heritage”? Several possible themes could have developed, such as a devotion to other-than-human persons, such as faeries, spirits, and gods.

But in fact, if there is one feature we do not find in the transmission of this folklore, it is the presence of other-than-human persons, such as fairies, sprites, or other “good people.” Nor, with the recent exception of the Fellowship of the Spiral Path, are gods or goddesses represented in this fashion. American culture, Pagans included, has long had a love affair with realism, even though impressive fantastical subcultures have indeed developed. In migrating to the Americas, traditional English and Scottish ballads, for the most part, lost their “ghosts, elves, and goblins.” De-supernaturalizing folklore was a standard part of Anglo-folk-song history. While Greek and Roman Reconstructionists have utilized Homeric and Sapphic poetry replete with ancient gods and goddesses,

16. Anonymous, “Great Pagan/Celtic Music,” iMix, Apple Computer iTunes Music Store, accessed online 8 November 2005. The anonymous creator includes a community rhetorical identifier (“Merry Meet”) in the iMix notes.

17. Blackmore’s Night, “The Times they are A-Changin’,” *Ameno*, Vol. 1 WM Czech Republic, 2001.

all those types of elements appear to have been completely absent from vernacular folk music. This raises an interesting question. If folk music has not bequeathed sacred persons to whom worship and relationship are directed, then what other specific elements (besides nationalism, populism, and identity politics) has it given contemporary Paganism?¹⁸

The answer seems to have been the ritual year, that "old time religion." From agricultural events to vernacular celebrations of Christmas, these American folk songs are often tinged with a rustic, nature-worshipping flavor. Again, this is consistent with other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetic elements of romantic pastoralism. For example, Rudyard Kipling's "A Tree Song" from his 1906 book *Puck of Pook's Hill* has not only been used by contemporary Pagans in worship, but is specifically associated with seasonal aspects of worship such as Beltane rites.¹⁹ The language used within and accompanying some of these American folk songs reflects a valorization of the vernacular and indigenous, sometimes even using language historically consistent and associated with established American traditions of unchurched religiosity, wildness, harmonial religion, and "timeless wisdom."²⁰

These elements are no stranger to American high culture. They are underrecognized or even prominent in telluric novels such as John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown* and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless me, Ultima*. But they also appear in folk-music discourse. For example, in a famous compilation of the folk-singing family the Armstrongs, Jean E. Campbell, wife of religion scholar Joseph Campbell, remarks that her husband and she enjoyed their music for its capacity to hold them "in joy to a Harmony of Being." The compilation, appropriately titled *Wheel of the Year*, also included an endorsement from prominent public intellectual Studs Terkel. Like the pagan vitalism of Steinbeck, Terkel frames the Armstrongs as showcasing "nature, man, woman, and the mystery of birth, death, and rebirth. They spin the wheel of life." Through the language of American harmonial religion, these sentiments connect folk song to the seasonal

18. Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Lives of Puppets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 79-80; David Buchan, "Ballads of Otherworld Beings," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narvaez (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 142; Clifton and Harvey, eds., *The Paganism Reader*, 11-14. The only exceptions to this cultural rule so far are revenant Scottish ballads found in Newfoundland.

19. Clifton and Harvey, eds., *The Paganism Reader*, 80-82.

20. For example, see Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1019-54. Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

vegetative view of life cycles important in much of contemporary Paganism, and demonstrate the relevance of folk song as a mediator and communicator between such traditions.²¹ While the lyrics, liner notes, and accompanying literature of the Armstrong family project expound what might be called a vernacular "mesopaganism" (referring to an inter-fusion of Christian, harmonial, and pagan elements), the graphics designers at Flying Fish records went even farther in the Pagan direction, issuing the Armstrong compilation with a ritual-year wheel calendar on the front cover of the CD, including such perennial favorites as Samhain, Beltane, Lughnasadh, and the equinoxes.²²

The Armstrong family was not the only example of this folk articulation of mesopagan ideas. The Watersons, best known perhaps for their work *Frost and Fire: A Calendar of Ritual and Magical Songs*, produced a collection of beautiful a cappella works. While Christianity and Paganism are often popularly portrayed in popular culture as being at odds with each other, this idea does not find merit in the Watersons' milieu of folk music. One song in particular, "Christmas is Now Drawing Near at Hand," stands out as an example. Liner notes for *Frost and Fire* claim not only that the melody dates to the sixteenth century, but also that the singing style is derived from gypsies roaming through the "West Midlands half a century before." Social marginalization and anti-institutionalism, themes common to contemporary Paganism, echo throughout the collections, including on this track. The liner notes themselves make this "mesopagan" matrix clear, and attribute it to economic forces:

Thus, the critical time of the winter solstice, a rich period for pagan ritual, became the season of the Nativity of the new god. The season of the great spring ceremonies became the time of his slaughter and resurrection. So it happens that in many songs on this record, Christian and pagan elements are inextricably tangled...it's due to their relation with economic life, not to any mystical connection, that the song-customs have persisted right up to our own time.

In a form that recalls Vaughan Williams's comparison between the *Iliad* and English folk music, the liner notes invoke the emotive power of ancient Greece and the humanistic legacy of Enlightenment to understand

21. See Zitkala Sha, "Why I am a Pagan," *Atlantic Monthly* 90.542 (December 1902): 801-803; Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 99-101; compare Jean Campbell's sentiment with Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 1019.

22. The Armstrong Family, *The Wheel of the Year: Thirty Years with the Armstrong Family* (Flying Fish Records Compact Disc, FF70594, 1992). Terkel's radio program on Chicago's WFMT featured the Armstrongs many times over many years.

the power of these folk tunes:

Just as one doesn't need to be an ancient Greek to be moved by the plays of Aeschylus, so it's not necessary to be anything other than an ordinary freethinking twentieth century urban western man with a proper regard for humankind, to appreciate the spirit and power of these songs.²³

Perhaps this mesopagan matrix accounts for the attraction that ostensibly Christian folk music can have for Pagan musicians. In the late 1990s, the Thelemic duo Coil released a version of "Christmas is Now Drawing Near at Hand" as part of a set of four compact discs. These EPs were issued in conjunction with the solstices and equinoxes of the ritual year calendar, complete with astrological information on the face of the disc itself.²⁴

A shared folk sense of the liturgical importance of the ritual year pervades other manifestations of contemporary Pagan music. In 2001, Llewellyn Publications published *A Bard's Book of Pagan Songs*, compiled by "Hugin the Bard." Each equinox and solstice in this book has its own musical piece, along with a page of explanation and introduction. Moreover, Muin Mound Grove (associated with ADF) has published four editions of *A Cycle of Druid Rituals*, a liturgical songbook also organized and centered on the celebration of seasonal ritual holidays.²⁵

From vegetative primitivism to the legacy of the Enlightenment and beyond, all these aspects can join a host of others already mentioned, such as romantic pastoralism, valorizing the vernacular, indigenous wisdom, and religious identity politics. All of these play a significant role in *Singing the Promise*, a Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans benefit concert recorded and issued under the auspices of the UU Church in 1998. Musicians, in many cases rooted in folklore and mythology, came together to issue a recording that, in many cases, offers many specific examples of this 'Pagan folk ideology' at work. Songs based in the Irish-American, Hebridean, and Xhosa traditions all are part of this recording, as are chants with Tibetan instruments. Folklorist Chris Wagner and feminist theologian Nancy Vedder-Shults composed and adapted several

23. A.L. Lloyd, introduction to the brochure notes for The Watsons, *Frost and Fire: A Calendar of Ritual and Magical Songs* (Topic Records Compact Disc, TSCD462, reissued 1995. Originally released as LP 12T136, 1965).

24. Coil, "Christmas is Now Drawing Near at Hand," *Winter Solstice: North* (Eskaton 019 Compact Disc, 1999). The song is sung here by Rose McDowell, formerly of the group "Strawberry Switchblade." She is credited on the Coil record as "Rosa Mundi," a name with both botanical and Rosicrucian occult significance.

25. Hugin the Bard, *A Bard's Book of Pagan Songs* (St Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 2001); Rev. Robert Lee (Skip) Ellison, "The Wheel of the Year at Muin Mound Grove," in *ADF: A Cycle of Druid Rituals* (East Syracuse, NY: Dragon's Keep Publishing, 2003).

contributions, such as the pastoral "Green God," "Hymn of the Earth," "The Grace of Her," and "Hymn to Gaia." All these songs, theological and soteriological statements in themselves, also proclaim an anthropology. To be authentically Pagan is indeed to be a certain kind of human: one rooted deeply in "folk" tradition.²⁶

The ritual year, so ingrained in the mesopagan matrix of the Watersons, the Andersons, ADF groves and Hugin the Bard, was essentially a plan for that authentically Pagan human. Properly Pagan humans thus perform movement and flow between nodes in the economy of poly(theological) power, fueling and further extending facets of a modern Pagan socio-sacred network, whether those nodes consist of indigenous religion, Christian mesopaganism, or lesbian consciousness. In *Singing the Promise*, folk music and folk ideology both provide a countercultural narrative to build authentic oppositional socio-sacred networks in opposition to Protestant Christian hegemony.

Conclusion: Religious Liberation and Cultural Capital

In *Sacred Song in America*, Stephen Marini devotes a chapter to "New Age" and "Neopagan" music. In doing so, he justifies his work by arguing that, unless the "innovative areas of our religious culture" are well-understood, we will not have a complete picture of the role of religious music in the United States. He, of course, is correct. And others have provided the fundamental American question that non-Christians, including Pagans, have asked themselves about music: "how to sing their own sacred songs in a land so dominated by one version of the divine." One answer is that religious traditions and their music in the United States have moved toward congregationalism and Protestant hymnody. There is ample evidence to suggest that this has been true in the cases of American Jews and Buddhists, for example.²⁷

Not nearly enough work has been done in order to fully explore the Pagan response(s) to this question. To even try to do so is to encounter a dizzying array of artists, volumes, and agendas. Hugin the Bard, The Watersons, The Andersons, and the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans occupy a multitude of historical and ideological spaces, and we must be careful not to simply lump them all together in some synchronic

26. Carole Eagleheart Khryso et al., *Singing the Promise: A CUUPS Benefit Concert* (Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans Inc., Compact Disc, no catalog number, 1998), more information at <http://www.cuups.org/content/merchandise/singing.html> (accessed 1 August 2006).

27. Marini, *A Sacred Song in America*, 163. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*, 295.

space. In fact, to do so would be to uncritically collapse the very real distinctions and languages at work here. But perhaps to return to Fairport Convention's heritage music provides a place of understanding.

In fact, "heritages" are the result of standard cultural processes for individuals, communities, and nations. The processes by which heritage music alone is created and legitimated are very complex, and involve economics, technology, and other forms of cultural positioning. Moreover, the development of American sacred narratives must be seen against the backdrop of the relatively young historical age of the United States. Just as many colonial white settlers emplotted a religious liberation narrative for themselves, and African-Americans read themselves into liberation history, so too have Pagans developed their own liberation and growth narratives as much through sacred song as any other community, identifying with folklore as a means towards authenticity.

Creating and maintaining successful "heritage," musically and otherwise, requires that community participants deploy a variety of self-conscious ideological and rhetorical strategies. For Pagans to associate themselves with romanticism, indigenous traditions, languages of identity politics and vernacular populism is to attempt to purchase, produce, and deploy "cultural capital."

Producing cultural capital using discourses of Paganism is less like a two-way street, and much more like a crowded, multi-tiered intersection. For centuries, authors, singers, and poets have appropriated languages of Paganism and its attendant concepts to validate and explain themselves—to create their own "cultural capital." Pagans, in turn, mine such history for their own purposes, and along with preserved manuscripts and recordings, more and more musical sources for Pagan use, such as Kate Marks's *Circle of Song*, Julie Forest Middleton's *Songs for Earthlings*, and Anna Kealoha's *Songs of the Earth*, are published all the time, further demonstrating and adding to the ongoing process. Regardless of its facets, the musical heritage process in this case appears to be firmly pointing towards the same end as other American religious impulses: ongoing participation and growth in religious socio-sacred networks.²⁸

28. I would like to thank both Maggie Rohde and Karin Leefers for their assistance with several recordings utilized in this article. Without their archival help, this article would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Kenny Klein for assistance in providing bibliographical information.

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